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AUTHOR Algren, Chris L.; Hockenberger, Susan
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ABSTRACT

The Bellarmine Outreach Consortium, which provides access to baccalaureate and masters education in nursing for registered nurses in Kentucky, West Virginia, and Tennessee, is described. The components of a marketing process for colleges are also considered, with attention to product, place, price, and promotion. The nursing department of Bellarmine College established the program in 1983 to bring quality nursing education to underserved areas, first in Kentucky and later in neighboring states. As of 1986, the consortium delivers the nursing programs to six off-campus sites. Courses are offered on a cyclical basis at cooperating hospitals and are usually offered in a weekend format. The Bellarmine College nursing faculty teach all nursing courses, which are under the direction of a master teacher. Liberal arts faculty from the college deliver other key courses, and the college determines the acceptability of courses taken at other institutions. Courses include learning modules that involve behavioral objectives, pretests, references, directions for learning experiences, use of audiovisual equipment, and posttests. Each student in the outreach program is assigned to a mentor in the local area, who assists the regional director in counseling and advisement of students and acts as a resource persons when faculty members are not on site. (SW)

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The Bellarmine Outreach Consortium: An Innovative Approach to Nursing Education

Chris L. Algren
Chair - MSN Program
Bellarmine College
Newburg Road
Louisville, Kentucky
40205

Susan Hockenberger
Chair - BSN Program
Bellarmine College
Newburg Road
Louisville, Kentucky
40205

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The Bellarmine Outreach Consortium:
An Innovative Approach to Nursing Education

The changing demographics of the American populace, particularly among young Americans, will profoundly impact higher education through the 1980s and into the 1990s. Over the next ten years higher education will experience a twenty-five percent decline in the traditional eighteen to twenty-two year old college age population, dramatic changes in the racial/ethnic composition, and regional shifts will affect all but a small number of colleges and universities (Baldridge, J. V., Kemerer, F. R. & Green, K. C., 1982). This decline in the traditional college student cohert could be offset if colleges and universities pursue "non-traditional markets", adults from twenty-five to fifty-five years of age (Bishop and VanDyk, 1977). A report by the National Commission on Non-Traditional Study (1974) argued that nearly eighty million adults were interested in obtaining more education, but in 1977 there were no more than five million adults actively engaged in education at traditional higher education institutions (Bureau of Census, 1978).

As a result of this apparent discrepancy between projected demand and actual enrollment, higher education institutions developed a marketing orientation, including strategic planning for enrollment management. For many educators, marketing, synonymous with selling, advertising, or promotion, has no place in an academic setting. Critics of marketing fear that the business side of education will begin to over shadow its mission and values. Colleges and universities should be evaluated on their academic merits and educational attributes, not on their marketing prowess. The purpose of higher education, to provide intellectual heritage and social leadership, makes complete responsiveness to market demands inappropriate. To meet the demands for high technology and job placement would be destructive and inappropriate. A consumer orientation might well result in an abolishment of liberal arts programs such as the classics, foreign languages, history, or philosophy. Our culture, as a whole, would suffer if higher education failed to provide a broader and more future directed view than can be envisioned by the population at large (McNamara, 1985).

A business activity is identified by those who accept marketing in a broader sense, that of determining and meeting consumer needs. Marketing, a positive way of responding to the inevitable changes in higher education, recognizes that higher education has a responsibility for cultural and intellectual development, and preservation and leadership within society. Kotler and Fox (1985) suggest that educational institutions appropriately adopt orientation to a societal marketing plan. A marketing plan considering societal demands takes into account consumer needs, desires, long term interests, and needs of society at large. Educational institutions must remain responsive to the needs and preferences of students, while preserving academic ideals, reputation, and other goals and commitments.

Exchange conceptualizes the driving force behind effective marketing. Through exchanges, colleges and universities attain the resources they need and their participants: students, faculty members, alumni, administrative personnel, and others. Society acquires what it needs in return, learned peoples, cultural exploration, and support for the workplace. The exchanges allow both parties to see themselves as mutual beneficiaries (Froberg, Salmon, & Spradley, 1986).

Product, place, price, and promotion comprise the essential components of the marketing process. Each of these components varies and can be altered to optimize the exchange between the university and its consumers. The products of the university consist of its academic programs, faculty members, job placement services, athletic program, library, and other facets of college life. Any of these products can be adopted to meet market demands. Many institutions have altered their educational product to appeal to different segments of the market. For example, evening programs aimed at the full-time day employee or the older adult flourish at some schools. In addition "weekend college" programs have been instituted for those who are unable to attend college in the traditional format. College, female in tradition, enroll men and have instituted programs in business, medicine, and graduate studies.

Place becomes part of the marketing strategy when the universities consider offering courses off campus or at times and places on campus convenient to students. Options for off-site locations become evident when marketing studies reflect underserved areas of potential students. Also, need can be determined not only by demographics that reflect limited access to higher degree

institutions, but also by the limitation of programs offered by existing institutions. Business administration, nursing, computer science, and education programs outreach to create new educational opportunities for students. Place also can change from the traditional college campus to business and industry. Programs, such as the MBA, can be taken to corporations to provide a needed service and ultimately resolve a corporate dilemma. Universities can broaden their channels of distribution by offering classes on military bases, industrial firm sites, and by offering courses broadcast over local television stations.

Price or cost deals with variables that can be altered even in a time of decreasing funding and financial resources. Discounts can be offered to select groups, such as senior citizens. Also, nonacademic sources can be sought for funding and/or scholarships. Pursuit of scholarships from corporations, tuition reimbursements from employers incentive programs, and grants from professional organizations provides some answers to the resource shortage. Deferment of tuition payback creates another price option for students.

Promotion involves public relations, advertising, direct mail, publications, direct solicitation, and other forms of communication. Colleges utilize mass media advertising in newspapers, magazines, radio, and occassionally television. Personal contact proves itself to be an important strategy, and institutions increasingly rely on students and alumni to systematically recruit prospective students.

The product, a tangible item, meets the market need. For higher education, curricular programs are products. These programs satisfy identified audience needs. Toper (1983) discusses products at three different levels. The primary benefit or educational service comprises the core level. The core reflects the central philosophy and purpose of the educational program. At the second level tangible products surround the core. This consists of features unique to the program of studies that relate directly to the degree awarded. These include the program delivery, selected course offerings, innovative teaching strategies, and quality education. The last level deals with the augmented products. These products reflect diagnostic criteria for evaluation of the program. These could include implementation, how is the need met; recognition, how the program is perceived by user and nonuser; delivery, how is the program brought to the consumer and identified;

and program evaluation.

To make the marketing strategies effective the image of the institution must also be considered. It is the institution's image, not necessarily the reality, that people respond to. An organizational image results as the aggregate of perceptions, values, attitudes, beliefs, and feelings that people have about the organization. Institutions of higher education are known for their differences, not their similarities. The images perceived when the name of the institution is mentioned are critical to its survival (Toper, 1983).

The image of Bellarmine College is set forth in its mission statement. The mission statement directs the organization into a position in the educational market place by providing a framework for a comprehensive marketing program. Bellarmine's mission gives direction to its educational programs. The mission includes, the formation of an academic community in which a scholarly field is explored, and in which careers are competently nurtured. At the same time, students are surrounded with "great hearted", intellegent mentors who "bring alive the worlds of religious faith, philosophy, ethics, and personal and societal commitments."

From this mission, the goals of the college direct its curricula. The goals speak to the creation of an environment in which students can "explore selected disciplines and mature intellectually so that they acquire competence in their profession and maintain or enhance leadership skills in order to be of service to their professions and to the institutions of a well ordered and pluralistic society." Flowing from the mission and goal statements of the college, the Departments of Nursing sought opportunities to bring quality nursing education to underserved areas in the state of Kentucky. In 1977 the BSN program was established to meet the need for baccalaureate prepared professional nurses in the local area. Then the program was expanded to the underserved areas within the state.

The profession of nursing today demands that nurses be prepared at the college level in order to care for individuals and families in a complex and technologically based health care system. New and emerging roles for nurses as well as a movement towards having a baccalaureate degree as the entry level into practice have increased the need for nurses to further their education. Many nurses in the state of Kentucky do not have access to undergraduate or graduate nursing education

within a reasonable distance to their homes and/or place of employment.

The Bellarmine Outreach Consortium was designed in 1983 to provide access to both baccalaureate and masters education in nursing for registered nurses in Kentucky, West Virginia, and Tennessee. Within this geographic area, only 18.2% of all registered nurses hold baccalaureate degrees in nursing, and less than 3% have a master's degree in nursing (Annual Report, Commonwealth of Kentucky, Board of Nursing, June 1985).

At this time, the Bellarmine Outreach Consortium delivers the nursing programs to six (6) off-campus sites: Ashland, located in eastern Kentucky 189 miles from Louisville; Corbin, 162 miles to the Southeast; Prestonsburg 184 miles in the southeastern Appalachian region; Lexington 64 miles to the east; Paducah, in Western Kentucky, 213 miles from Bellarmine; and Elizabethtown 40 miles to the south.

Courses are offered on a systematic, cyclical basis at cooperating local hospitals. These courses are identical in content to courses taught on the Bellarmine campus in Louisville. Classes are usually offered in a week-end format. For example, a three semester hour class would be offered on three Friday evenings and Saturdays (example, 5 p.m. - 9 p.m. on Fridays and 8 a.m. - 4 p.m. on Saturdays) during the semester. Since most of the students are employed full-time, this facilitates arranging for release time. Since students in the Outreach Consortium meet the same admission, progression, and graduation requirements as on-campus students, they may enroll in classes on any off-campus or on-campus site.

The nursing faculty of Bellarmine College, Lansing School of Nursing, deliver all nursing courses. Each course is under the direction of a Master Teacher who has responsibility for the content of the course. This responsibility assures program consistency regardless of where the course is being taught. Liberal arts faculty from Bellarmine deliver other key courses believed to be unique to the program. All other courses in the curriculum are taken at one regionally accredited college in the local area. Bellarmine College determines the acceptability of courses taken at other institutions.

Learning activities include a variety of strategies based on adult learning principles.

One methodology utilized is the use of learning modules supplemented by audiovisual support as needed, which allow students to prepare in advance for sessions with faculty. These modules include: (a) behavioral objectives; (b) pre-test; (c) references; (d) directions for learning experiences; (e) use of audiovisual equipment; and (f) posttest.

Although the curriculum responsibilities and course offerings are under the direction of the Department Chairperson, each outreach site has a regional director who resides in the local area. The regional director has total responsibility for the direction and operation of the program at the outreach setting. This includes hiring of administrative staff and faculty, advisement of students, and recruitment. The regional director is directly responsible to the Dean of the School for all administrative responsibilities. Communications are open and ongoing between the main campus and the outreach locations. The regional director has the obligation to attend all curriculum and school meetings on the Bellarmine Campus. Departments on the main campus maintain the responsibility for records, class registration, and distribution of texts and syllabi.

In order for the outreach consortium to reach its goals, each student in the outreach program is also assigned to a mentor in the local area. The mentor assists the regional director in the counseling and advisement of each student and is available as a resource person when faculty members are not on site.

As of the Fall semester 1986, there are 103 students enrolled in baccalaureate studies and 66 in the masters program in nursing in the outreach areas. The evaluation of this project is ongoing and will validate the effectiveness and fiscal impact of this delivery model. Of course, the long-range impact will be judged by the major changes in nursing made by the graduates throughout the rural areas of Kentucky.

In summary, the Bellarmine College Outreach Consortium is designed to provide advanced nursing education for registered nurses within a reasonable distance to their home and/or place of employment. This project offers students such unique advantages as:

- classes designed to meet the needs and learning styles of the adult learner;
- students with similar backgrounds and goals;
- courses offered at geographically convenient locations;
- credit and course work transferable statewide;
- outstanding faculty members from a liberal arts college; and
- flexible time schedules.

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